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# ON THE DATE OF THE UMLAUT OF *o* AND *u* IN MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN.

Middelnedertyske omlydsforhold belyst ved danske laanord. Clara Holst, *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi* 18. 1902, pp. 210-225.

The date of the umlaut of *o* and *u* in MLG. is still an open question. According to Grimm MLG. had only umlaut of *a*. The later umlaut of *o* and *u* Lübken in his MLG. grammar regards as due to HG. influence, and to have been introduced during Reformation period. The reason for this conclusion is that while umlaut of *a* is regularly indicated, that of *o* and *u* is not thus indicated before Luther. That the language of Luther and his followers had a considerable influence in northern Germany where the Reformation early established itself is known, but this influence was chiefly a lexicographical one. That it should have extended to the sounds of LG. is extremely unlikely. Behaghel has pointed out<sup>1</sup> that there is not infrequent interchange of *e* and *o* and of *i* and *u* in MLG., a fact that can only be explained on the assumption that *o* and *u* also served to represent the sound *ö* and *ü*, that is, that umlaut of *o* and *u* existed. In fact priority in the designation of the umlaut of *a* by no means proves priority of the umlaut of *a* over that of *o* and *u*, for, as Behaghel points out, the Latin alphabet offered a ready symbol for the designation of the umlaut of *a*, that is *e*, while it possessed no symbol that could adequately represent the sound that came from *o* and *u* by i-umlaut. The priority of the umlaut of *a* is possible but cannot be proved from German orthography. That umlaut of *a*, *o* and *u* all three existed in MLG. seems certain. What date must we assign to the umlaut of *o* and *u* if later than of *a*?

Umlaut of *a* first appears in writing in HG. in the middle of the 8th century.<sup>1</sup> That of *ä* appears first in Low Franconian in the 9th century.<sup>1</sup> Umlaut of *ä* is not designated elsewhere in Germany before the 11th or 12th century. Umlaut of *u* is first designated in the end of the OHG. period. Likewise that of *ü*. The latter was represented by *û*, *iu*, or *u*. The umlaut of *ö* is nowhere indicated in OHG., but with increasing regularity in the MHG. period. In MLG. there is, as has been said, no clear and consistent attempt to distinguish between the umlauted and the unumlauted vowel. The great orthographic confusion of MLG. increases the difficulty of the

<sup>1</sup> Paul, *Grundriss* I<sup>2</sup>, 694.

problem. The use of *a* to designate both *a* and *e* brought about a confusion as to the value of these symbols, resulting in the writing of *e* in numerous cases where the sound was actually *a*, and the same would of course hold good for the symbols *o* and *e* and *u* and *i*, though on LG. territory to a less extent, for here *o* and *u* stood quite generally for both the unumlauted and the umlauted vowel, that is here the historical writing prevailed later. Now the nearest symbol that the Latin alphabet offered for the umlaut of *u* was *i*. This, however, far from adequately represented the sound. Even long after the umlaut had taken place the sound was certainly much nearer *u* than *i* by reason of the rounding that is common to *u* and its umlaut. For a long time it would then be out of the question to represent the umlaut of *u* by *i*, the historical writing with *u* was also at the same time better phonetically. Not until the umlauted sound was sufficiently palatalized to occupy an approximately half-way position between *u* and *i* would *i* come to represent this new sound to any considerable extent. This consideration explains why the umlaut of *u* as indicated by *i* in LG. appears so much later in point of time than that of *a* as indicated by *e*. The case is very much the same with the graphic representation of the umlaut of *o*. The nearest symbol that the Latin alphabet offered for this was *e*. But for a long time *o* was a more exact sign for the umlaut of *o* than was *e*, and not until the palatalization of *o* had proceeded far enough so that the result was a sound approximately half-way between *o* and the sound that *e* commonly had stood for would *e* be likely to be employed to any considerable extent as its graphic symbol. When finally *e* had come to be used as the symbol of the umlauted *o*, the conditions were at hand that would lead to a confusion between the symbols *e*, *o* and *a* since *e* was also the symbol of the umlauted *a*. Under these conditions not only were *e* and *o* written frequently for one another but *a* might of course also appear for *o* and vice versa.

Clara Holst suggests as a reason for the late designation of umlaut of *o* and *u* the strongly labialized character of the North German unumlauted *o* and *u*, while in South German the sound has been unrounded and approximated to *e* and *i*. It is suggested that this pronounced labialization of LG. as compared with HG. may have existed already in MLG., so that a special designation was not felt to be necessary.

The suggestions here thrown out may be carried further. It is

very probable that the broadness of the umlaut of *ä* and the open character of the umlaut of *o* and *u* which characterizes South German began early. It is likely that the South German umlaut of *o* in the Middle German period was an opener sound than that of North German (cf. J. Meier, *PBB.* xv. 333). The designation of the umlauted *o* by *e* would then begin earlier in South German than it would in North or Low German. In the introduction to his edition of the MLG. version of the *Legend of Mary Magdalen*, the date of which is 1449, in Vol. 4, No. 2 (1903), of this JOURNAL, Carl E. Eggert expresses the belief that the existence of an umlaut of short *o* and *u* in MLG. cannot be positively decided. The sign  $\ddot{\phantom{a}}$  placed over *y*, *u*, *o* served merely to prevent confusion with a following or preceding *n* or *m*. If, as Behagel states, MG.  $\ddot{u}$  represented two distinct sounds,  $\ddot{u}$  and  $\ddot{u}$ , this might also be true for LG. and the analogous proposition might hold for  $\ddot{o}$  that was originally long as well as *o* and *u* lengthened in open syllables and before *r*, hence *över*, *vögel*n, &c. Then it might also apply to short vowels (that remained short), *umme*, *sus*, *alsus*, &c., would then have to be written *ümme*, *süs*, *alsüs*. That there are, however, exceedingly few cases of poor rimes such as *o* :  $\ddot{o}$ , *u* :  $\ddot{u}$ , and he concludes that such rimes as *alsus* : *Maximus* 17-18, *sunde* : *stunde* 211-12, *sunde* : *wunde* 347-8, *hore* : *bevore* 35-6, were not intentionally impure, but that umlaut was a later development.

The confusion in writing between *u* and *i* which occurs in the word *schut* 727, where *u* stands for *i*, *schut* = *schit* < *schichen* (cf. M. Du. *geschien*) = *schehen*, *geschehen*, shows that *u* stood for *u* and *i*. Its double function is explainable only by the fact that umlaut existed here also. With regard to the umlaut of *ö* Behagel says: Auch bei urgerm. *ö* vor *i*, *j* erscheint im heutigen Niederdeutschen der Umlaut; über die Zeit seines Eintritts lässt sich nichts sicheres ermitteln (*Gr.* i<sup>2</sup>, 695).<sup>1</sup> With regard to the long vowels C. A. Eggert accepts umlaut of WG. *ö* as in HG. though not indicated in *behöde* 441, *geröken* 298, *genömen* 34, *söte* 85, *föte* n. l. 86, and *on tüge* 350. According to this then, umlaut of long *o* and *u* is prior to that of short *o* and *u*. Priority of umlaut would

<sup>1</sup>C. Holst referring to Behagel's statement in *Grundr.* i<sup>2</sup>, 694 says: 'En anden opfatning begynder dog nu at gjöre sig gjældende, den nemlig, at den mnt. omlýd er af en ældre datum og optræder samtidig med den mht,' where the reference is to the umlaut of  $\ddot{o}$  and  $\ddot{u}$ . In the statement in question in *Gr.* i<sup>2</sup>, 694, Behagel discusses only the short vowels, *a*, *ä* and *ö* being discussed below.

rather seem to be on the side of the short vowels, and the process must have taken place early in MLG. times.

C. Holst has in *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi*, 210-225 (1902), offered evidence from the form of MLG. loan-words in Middle Danish, showing that the words in question had the umlauted vowel farther back in the MLG. period than it would seem has been supposed. A downward limit can thus be fixed after which the umlaut of *ö* and *ü* cannot be dated. The list here offered contains 54 words with the umlauted vowel corresponding to the umlauted vowel in present LG. The umlaut of *ö* and *ü* is evidenced in 19 words, that of *u* in 8. The material for *ö* is more abundant, there being 27 words in which umlaut here is shown. The material represents especially the last half of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th. The umlaut of *ö* appears in loan-words as early as 1300, a little later the umlaut of *u*. The umlaut of *ü* appears as early as 1300 and that of *ö* is indicated as early as 1387. It is not possible to separate *ü* and *ö* in the loan-words, *ü* having also quite often become *ö* in MLG.

The umlaut of *ü* being evidenced as early at 1300 it is pretty certain that umlaut of *ö* also existed at that time. At this time then umlaut of *ö* and *ü* is made certain in writing in loan-words in old Danish and this becomes the downward limit. We may then with safety put the date of umlaut of *o* and *u* both long and short in MLG. as early as 1250.<sup>1</sup> What can be attributed to HG. influence and Luther's language is the signs with which the umlaut was indicated and a growing consistency after the Reformation to indicate the umlaut of *o* and *u*, the umlaut itself, however, having become fairly general in the last half of the 13th century.

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<sup>1</sup>In *PBB.* 7 in his article 'Die Mundarten des alten niedersächsischen Gebietes zwischen 1300 und 1500 nach den Urkunden dargestellt,' H. Tümpel has (pp. 33-34, 41-42 and 50 ff.) listed a number of words from MLG. texts, many from the 14th century, where umlaut is indicated, but leaves the question undecided as to whether umlaut actually existed, as in the case of *u*, e. g., the sign used simply serves to differentiate it from *n* or *m*, while there are other signs that are quite unintelligible. Among the words having umlauted vowel indicated are *stucken* 1345 Oldenburg, *stucke* 1335 Osnabrück, *orkunde* 1343 Hildesheim, *dunket* 1336 Magdeburg, *worden* 1346 Hildesheim, *opinlekir* 1368 Quedlinburg, *sonen* 1345 Oldenburg, *sonc*, *gheboret* 1335 Mansfeld, *muren* 1345 Oldenburg, *versumt* 1346 Hildesheim, *hus* 1385 Salzbürg, *wedel*, *noden*, *los*, *horen*, *lophen* Hildesheim and *horen* 1349 Quedlinburg.